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ABSTRACT

Reviewed are a number of techniques, strategies, and competencies which teachers need to develop for working with handicapped preschoolers. Techniques (such as keeping tasks brief) are listed, principals (including that children's needs must be met immediately) are reviewed, and a class schedule for teacher trainees is outlined. (SBH)

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TEACHER TRAINING STRATEGIES FOR PRESCHOOL HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

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INTRODUCTION

Results of research studies have demonstrated that early learning is the most important learning, and if a child is deprived of early learning, he cannot or is extremely unlikely to "catch up" at a later time in life. An early study which has become a classic began in the 1930's and culminated in a later study in the 1960's. A group of children under age three and unsuitable for adoption were transferred from an orphanage to an institution for retarded women. The environment was more stimulating, and included more activities and experiences than that of the orphanage. Significant I. Q. gains were observed in those children. Later, in adult life all members of this group were self-supporting, well-developed, and attractive, with a mean education of grade 12.8. The group remaining in the orphanage compared very unfavorably in terms of occupation, marital status, and education (Skeels, 1966). Other studies have shown similar results. (Wells, 1939; Reymert, 1939; Kirk, 1958). Educators and child development experts agree that educational intervention has its greatest effect upon children of preschool age (Lillie, 1975).

According to Lillie (1975), a structured preschool program for the handicapped should meet the following goals:

1. Increase the rate of growth in each specific area of development. Unless the child's rate of growth is increased substantially, he will always be behind in those particular areas. For example, if a child grows in language skills at a rate of only six months per year, each year he will fall further behind his chronological-age peers. The preschool's job is to maximize the rate of development for that particular child.

2. Longitudinal assessment and diagnosis. For educational as well as medical purposes, a formal objective assessment provides the information needed for planning an individual program. Continuing informal assessment provides specific information for establishing both treatment and educational objectives. Neurological and physical evaluation during the preschool years should provide additional diagnostic information for possible medical, nutritional or therapeutic treatment, as well as for continued educational treatment.

3. Specific skill training to provide readiness for the next educational placement. This goal will naturally overlap with the first goal listed above. However, there are specific skills that are not necessarily within the providence of one of the developmental curriculum areas which need to be learned as prerequisites for the next educational placement. Such skills might include sitting and attending for twenty minutes in a structured lesson situation; or, if the next placement is a regular first grade classroom, skills might include counting to ten, recall of alphabet, and discrimination and identification of five colors.

Whereas Lillie emphasizes increased rate of growth, assessment and specific skill training, other authorities give more emphasis to socialization. For example, Mack (1975), has identified three general goals for an early childhood program:

1. To help children function in a group setting (socialization).

2. To help children develop learning skills that assist them to learn throughout their educational careers (school readiness)

3. To help children achieve meaningful personal awareness (identifying themselves in relation to others).

Teaching Strategies

In order to insure that these goals will be met in preschool programs for the handicapped, there should be a systematic methodology based on educational technology and knowledge about how young children learn (Lillie, 1975). Techniques and strategies for working with preschoolers must be

included in preservice training. Preservice teachers must be given opportunities to develop competencies in this area.

A survey of the literature identified a number of techniques, strategies, or competencies which teachers need to develop.

One major concern of teachers is how to effectively present material to students. Similar teaching techniques are appropriate for both mentally handicapped students and preschoolers because both groups fall within Piaget's early stages of cognitive development.

Kolstoe recommends the following techniques:

1. The tasks should be uncomplicated. The new tasks should contain the fewest possible elements, and most of the elements should be familiar, so he has few unknowns to learn.

2. The tasks should be brief. This assures that he will attent to the most important aspects of the tasks and not get lost in a sequence of interrelated events.

3. The tasks should be sequentially presented so the learner proceeds in a sequence of small steps, each one built upon previously learned tasks.

4. Each learning task should be the kind in which success is possible. One of the major problems to overcome is that of failure proneness. This major deterrent to learning can be effectively reduced through success experiences.

5. Over-learning must be built into the lessons. Drills in game form seem to lessen the disinterest in unimaginative drill.

6. Learning tasks should be applied to objects, problems, and situations in the learner's life environment. Unless the tasks are relevant, the learner has great difficulty in seeing their possible importance. (Kolstoe, 1976).

Instruction should be based on diagnosis of the child's specific strengths and weaknesses. Preservice teachers need to become familiar with both formal and informal assessment techniques. In the Early Childhood Center at North Carolina Central University formal assessment consists largely of the administration of the Learning Accomplishment Profile (LAP).

For a teacher to develop good informal assessment skills, he must be a good listener and a good observer of children's behavior and responses. This is essential if he is to be able to answer the question, "what can the child do?" Behavior checklists are useful in helping teachers to observe children's behavior but should not restrict observation of other behaviors not listed.

The diagnostic-prescriptive teaching cycle of diagnosis, educational planning, implementation of the plan and evaluation is used in the Early Childhood Center at North Carolina Central University.

Based upon the results of evaluation and informal assessment following the completion of each lesson plan, the objectives are revised. It is recommended that teaching follow a plan based on task analysis (Safford, 1978). Each lesson must be presented in an ordered sequence of steps. Successive lessons are then planned to build upon what the child has learned. Teachers must be able to analysis tasks ranging in complexity from tying a shoe to working an addition problem.

Few would argue that success is not an important element in the teaching of children. Teachers should provide success experiences and provide reinforcement when the child succeeds. Hendrick (1975) recommends that the teacher "show the child you are pleased with him and that you like him." The teacher must be genuine and realistic with the child. Success experiences given the child must be realist and challenging. Learning is not accomplished either too easy or too difficult. A perceptive teacher will modify difficulty level when appropriate. If a teacher becomes accustomed to thinking in terms of task analysis, he will know that changes need to be made if a child is not ready to perform a particular task.

As with children at higher educational levels, the motivation of preschoolers is affected by choice of materials.

Two principles to be kept in mind when using materials are to proceed from the concrete to the abstract and to proceed from the familiar or known to the unknown. Also it is generally accepted that many children learn better through a number of sensory modalities (Fernald, 1943). The implication of this for the use of multi-sensory materials is self evident.

Mack (1975) recommends that a teacher of preschoolers use both direct and indirect guidance. Direct guidance helps the child learn acceptable behavior. This can be accomplished by establishing limits for the child's behavior; verbally guiding a child from an unacceptable behavior to an acceptable one; and by speaking positively by telling a child what to do instead of what not to do.

In helping teachers with the guidance role, the following child guidance principles must be observed:

1. Responses to children must be genuine.
2. Children must be treated in a consistent manner.
3. Children's needs must be met immediately.
4. Children must be accepted unconditionally (Mack, 1975).

Indirect guidance includes the structuring which should be an integral part of each teacher's day. Preservice teachers must learn the value of leaving the room orderly at the end of the day, having materials and equipment ready, reviewing the next day's plans and doing all preparation so the teacher is ready to teach when the children arrive. Lillie (1975) emphasizes that planning and organization are extremely important factors for learning to occur.

Teacher Training Strategies

Teacher training strategies are implemented in the following ways:

1. Course Work - All undergraduate students choosing special education as an area of concentration enroll in Education 464, Methods and Materials for Teaching the Mentally Retarded. Prior to this, the students have made a comprehensive study of an individual child, five years old or younger, using the Carolina Developmental Profile. The following areas are investigated: gross motor, fine motor, visual perception, reasoning, receptive language and expressive language. During the 464 semester each student will complete another comprehensive evaluation using the LAP. Education majors also can enroll in two other courses which provide experience in public school classrooms prior to their student teaching semester.

2. Practicum - All students enrolled in Education 464 complete on site experiences in the Early Childhood Center according to the following schedule:

CLASS SCHEDULE

First Week	Observation days for teacher trainees
Second Week	Each teacher trainee will evaluate one preschool child's existing skills in in the area of Math, Pre-reading and Fine Motor.
Third Week	Teacher trainees will plan lessons and teach preschool children they evaluated in the areas of Math, Pre-reading and Fine Motor.
Fourth Week	Continuation of third week schedule. Initial evaluation of teacher trainees.
Fifth Week	Teacher trainees will plan lessons for and teach preschool children in the areas of Math, Pre-reading, Fine Motor and Self-Help.
Sixth Week	Teacher trainees will conduct last weeks' schedule and add one ten minute Science experiment weekly for the three students assigned to them. Second evaluation of teacher trainees.

Seventh Week	Teacher trainees will plan lessons for and teach students in the areas of Math, Pre-reading, Fine Motor, Self-Help, Science and Art.
Eighth Week	Teacher trainees will conduct last weeks' schedule and add one ten minute music activity for their six students. Third evaluation of teacher trainees.
Ninth Week	Teacher trainees will plan activities and teach all the children in the following areas: Math, Pre-reading, Fine Motor, Self-Help, Science, Art, Music and Gross Motor.
Tenth Week	Continuation of ninth week schedule. Fourth evaluation of teacher trainees.
Eleventh Week	Continuation of ninth week schedule. Each teacher trainee will evaluate coordinator and educational site.
Twelfth Week	Final evaluation of teacher trainees.

3. Close cooperation and planning between the instructor of the course and the director of the Early Childhood Center is essential. Agreement must be reached concerning procedure, tasks, amount of work to be completed and competency level required of all students.

CONCLUSION

The teacher's role includes being knowledge-imparter, disciplinarian, decision-maker, facilitator and planner, organizer and evaluator (Schickedanz, 1977).

The teacher is the key person to good preschool education. She must be effective in implementing new ideas, using new materials and presenting knowledge to the child. She must realize that she cannot hand knowledge to the child but must present it at the child's level so he can assimilate it.

Without her touch and skill, the most sophisticated curriculum will be limp and boring. It is her philosophy and technique that counts. (Hess and Croft, 1972).

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